



Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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WSDA report calls for more dialogue on organic food commission

OLYMPIA – More dialogue needs to take place before any action is taken on forming an organic food commission, according to a report available now from the state Department of Agriculture (WSDA). If enough support develops to create an organic commission, WSDA recommends that it operate under a separate law that would address the specific needs of the organic food industry.

After hearing differing opinions about the need for an organic food commission, the state Legislature last spring directed WSDA to undertake a study of the issue. In carrying out the study, the department surveyed the state's 535 certified organic producers, gathered information from the state's 24 agricultural commodity commissions, and convened a work group of organic producers and representatives of commissions and industry groups.

"WSDA assisted in a fact-finding process surrounding commission law and facilitated discussion among the interested parties," said Leslie Emerick, legislative affairs coordinator for WSDA.

Organic tree fruit growers have the greatest interest in forming an organic food commission, according to last spring's survey. However, the survey also shows that most organic tree fruit growers do not support establishing an organic commission if they also have to pay existing assessments to other commissions. Most smaller, mixed vegetable growers oppose forming an organic food commission that would include mandatory assessments.

The report notes that organic growers benefit from the activities of the state's existing commodity commissions but that organic producers also have distinct research, regulatory and promotional needs.

The Organic Food Commission Report identifies several approaches that growers or existing commissions could consider to address the distinct needs of organic growers. These include organic growers becoming more involved with existing commissions, establishing formal organic committees within current commissions, and forming an organic trade association. It also suggests that existing commissions enhance communications about current achievements for organic promotional activities, trade barrier assistance and research on non-chemical pest management.

For more information on organic food commission project findings, recommendations to the Legislature and survey results, visit the WSDA Web site at <http://www.wa.gov/agr/FoodAnimal/Organic/comproj.htm>.

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